











## A LIBRARY FOR FIVE POUNDS

WORKS BY

**W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, LL.D.**

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GEORGE MORROW

IAN MACLAREN The Life of the Rev. John Watson,  
D.D. With Portrait FIFTH EDITION

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LETTER ON LIFE EIGHTH EDITION

THE DAY BOOK OF CLAUDIUS CLEAR THIRD  
EDITION

LONDON HODDER & STOUGHTON

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BY  
CLAUDIUS CLEAR

FOURTH EDITION

HODDER AND STOUGHTON  
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## PREFACE

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THE following chapters were written as letters in the *British Weekly*, and in obedience to the wishes of many readers they are now collected.

As I write, the price of books is being raised, and my figures though accurate as far as I can make them so, may be wrong in various particulars. I hope to write a companion volume on Recent and Contemporary Authors. Mr Dobson in his *A Bookman's Budget* has reprinted Coleridge's wise words on the Influence of Contemporaries.

"No models of past times, however perfect, can have the same vivid effect on the youthful mind as the production of a contemporary genius. . . . The great works of past ages seem to a young man things of

another race, in respect to which his faculties must remain passive and submissive, even as the stars and mountains. But the writings of a contemporary, perhaps not many years older than himself, surrounded by the same circumstances, and disciplined by the same manners, possess a reality for him, and inspire an actual friendship as of a man for a man. His very admiration is the wind which fans and feeds his hope. The poems themselves assume the properties of flesh and blood. To recite, to extol, to contend for them is but the payment of a debt due to one who exists to receive it."

HAMPSTEAD,

October, 1917

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# *A Library for Five Pounds*

## I

### A LIBRARY FOR FIVE POUNDS

#### INTRODUCTION

I PROPOSE to give a list of the best books for reading, which shall include, say, one hundred volumes, to be obtained at the price of five pounds or thereabouts. Under most of the titles I hope to place reasons why the particular book named should stand on the shelves. A few preliminary observations may not be amiss.

In the first place, I propose to name books which shall be enjoyable, with a certain proportion of reference books. Reading must be made a pleasure if it is to be persevered in. There is no doubt that, comparatively speaking, very few people read books. In fact, many regard books as a hindrance to the enjoyment of life.

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Educated men by the thousand read nothing but newspapers, with perhaps a little contemporary fiction. They have no desire to read. What they expect from the author is that he shall amuse and entertain them for the moment. But, as Ruskin says, "There is a society continually open to us, of people who will talk to us as long as we like, whatever our rank or occupation; talk to us in the best words they can choose, and with thanks if we listen to them. And this society, because it is so numerous and so gentle, and can be kept waiting round us all day long, not to grant audience, but to gain it—kings and statesmen lingering patiently in those plainly furnished and narrow ante-rooms, our bookcase shelves—we make no account of that company—perhaps never, listen to a word they would say all day long."

Richard of Bury, at a time when printed books did not exist, spoke in the same spirit. "There are masters," he wrote in his *Philobiblion* (A.D. 1340), "who instruct us

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without chastisement, without anger, without fear ; if you repair to them they are not sleepy ; if you ask them anything they do not hide themselves ; if you blunder they complain not ; if you betray ignorance they laugh not."

• It is true that readers will profit most by what they enjoy most. Said Dr. Johnson : " A man ought to read just as inclination leads him, for what he reads as a task will do him little good." Johnson himself, from his early days in Lichfield onwards, read just as he pleased. But it would be too much to say that inclination is a safe guide. Inclination has to be educated, and this cannot be done unless the pupil is prepared to take trouble and make a little sacrifice. That is, we must take the best books on trust and set ourselves diligently to find out what made them great. If we do so, and if we find ourselves in sympathy, we have won a great victory. Matthew Arnold defined culture as " acquaintance with the best that has been thought and written." To this it has been

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added that we should know "the best that has been composed, painted and built." The thing, however, is to make a beginning. Once make a beginning and read a good book with delight and you have taken a step which will not be retraced, which will, if followed up, call you higher and higher.

So then in making this list I have refrained from giving the names of difficult books, even if they are of the first rank. This, be it noted, is a preliminary list. As it stands it will supply a library very much larger and very much better selected than the average library in a middle-class home. I will go further and say that every one who faithfully goes through these hundred books or so will be much more cultured, much better educated, than the vast majority of men and women.

I am almost ashamed to point out that it is worth while for a man to buy these books even if he has no intention of reading them. The presence of good books in a

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house sweetens and freshens the air. Almost always there will be some one in the house—a son or a daughter perhaps—who will take up the books and grow wise even though the parents confine themselves to the newspapers. Good books never stand up in their mute appeal to readers without being answered at one time or another. So if any reader says to himself that he is too old to begin studying, let him remember the case of others and give them a chance. How terrible is the spectacle of a bookless house, and I am afraid it is too common. A friend of mine stayed for a week-end at a rather luxurious home and found three books in the place, of which one was a Bradshaw and another a prayer-book. I forget what the third was, but it was some odd volume. Other houses again have a good many books which have come down from antiquity, mostly incomplete. Nobody has read them, but they have been allowed to stay. Sometimes it comes into the mind of the unhappy owners that they may be very



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strength left after their day's work to sustain serious reading. They may delight in reading even more than ever, but they weary quicker—not through lack of interest, but want of strength. Of course I am talking as a miner, where one has to give all his strength and more than his strength to each day's work. But with reading, as with other things, it is, Learn young, learn fair." I have examined his catalogue and find many capital books like volumes by Locke, Bacon, Berkeley, Hume, Adam Smith, Gibbon, Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne, Emerson, Homer, Johnson, Boswell, and many others. It is cheering to think there are so many men busily occupied in the labour of the hands who maintain their intellectual interests so remarkably and give a fair proportion of their means to the purchase of books.

And now to my list. The books named are nearly all included in Mr. Dent's wonderful enterprise, "Everyman's Library," and in the no less admirable

## *Books of Reference*

“World’s Classics.” These are among the greatest, most spirited and most useful enterprises of modern publishing. But the inquiring reader is respectfully requested to apply to a bookseller in case of any difficulty. Booksellers are fully alive to the value of cheap editions and to their increasing vogue, and may be trusted to give information accurately and pleasantly. Some books have gone out of print in the meantime, but, generally speaking, they can be procured without difficulty. I do not bind myself to make up the exact sum of £5, but hope to get sufficiently near it.

## BOOKS OF REFERENCE

It is necessary to have some books of reference. I assume that each reader has a Bible. The best one-volume edition of *Shakespeare* is the Globe edition of Messrs. Macmillan (8s. 6d.). The best *English Dictionary* at the price is that of Chambers

## *Essays and Belles Lettres*

(3s. 6d.). To this should be added Chambers's *Gazetteer*, which costs 7s. 6d. All Chambers's reference books are of the highest order. And I most strongly recommend the *Everyman Encyclopædia*, in twelve volumes. It is priceless to the ordinary reader.

### ESSAYS AND BELLES LETTRES

Essays are amongst the most attractive and valuable forms of literature. There are comparatively very few first-rate essays in English. A good essayist is less common than a good novelist.

*Bacon's Essays* (Dent) are in the van of our prose literature. *Bacon's Essays*, says John Morley, "are the unique masterpiece in our literature of this oracular wisdom of life, applied to the scattered occasions of men's existence." Dean Church said: "These short papers say what they have

## *Essays and Belles Lettres*

to say without preface and, in literary undress, without a superfluous word, without the joints and bands of structure ; they say it in brief, rapid sentences, which come down sentence after sentence like the strokes of a great hammer." The late Principal Caird, of Glasgow, who was highly competent to speak, declared that Bacon's greatest and most characteristic work was his *Essays*.

The hostile critics are represented by Emerson, who says : "*Bacon's Essays* are the portrait of an ambitious and profound calculator—a great man of the vulgar sort. Of the upper world of man's being they speak few and faint words."

Nevertheless, it remains true that, though the book can be read from beginning to end in a few hours, "after the twentieth perusal one seldom fails to remark in it something overlooked before." As Johnson said, "their excellence and value consist in their being the observations of a strong mind operating upon life, and, in consequence,

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you will find there what you seldom find in other books."

The *Essays of Elia*, by Charles Lamb, are perhaps the most delightful and alluring of all essays in English. The Americans have taken a particular delight in these, and R. H. Hutton admits that in some respects, though in some only, Charles Lamb's humour anticipates the type of humour which we now call, in the main, American. An American critic says: "We never rise from one of his essays without a feeling of contentment. He leads our thoughts to the actual available springs of enjoyment. He reconciles us to ourselves, causing home pleasures and the charms of the wayside and the mere comforts of existence to emerge from the shadow into which our indifference has cast them into the light of fond recognition. In truth, there are few better teachers of gratitude than Lamb." Another genial American, Edward Eggleston, tells how Lamb found him. "What I felt most keenly was the intellectual starvation I suffered

## *Essays and Belles Lettres*

in the strenuous pioneer life of Minnesota in 1856. About this time there came along a man who conducted a book business on a plan I have never heard of since. He carried the priced catalogue of Derby and Jackson, and took orders for any book on the list. I bought in this way a copy of Charles Lamb's works. It was my only book in a land where books were not, and it was no end of advantage to me. His delicious and whimsical humour is a great prophylactic against priggery. I cleave still to my stout one-volume copy of Lamb. There are many better editions, but none so good for me as this, with its margins covered by pencil notes, humiliating enough now, for they reveal the crudities, prejudices, immaturities of the young man who wrote them." .

To *Emerson's Essays* I look back with the warmest appreciation. They were among the first essays I ever read. They remain among the best and the most suggestive. If one's mind comes to a standstill, it is set

mōving more surely by Emerson than by any other. It will be sufficient to procure the two series of Essays, leaving others to the future. John Morley wrote: "Though it is only the other day that Emerson walked the earth and was alive among us, he is already one of the privileged few whom the reader approaches in the mood of settled respect and whose names have surrounded themselves with an atmosphere of religion." Professor Tyndall said amusingly and half to himself: "The first time I ever knew Waldo Emerson was when, years ago, a young man, I picked up on a stall a copy of his *Nature*. I read it with much delight, and I have never ceased to read it; and if any one can be said to have given *the* impulse to my mind it is Emerson. Whatever I have done the world owes to him." And Lowell says in his fine panegyric: "We look upon him as one of the few men of genius whom our age has produced, and there needs no better proof of it than his masculine faculty of fecundating other minds. Search for his

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eloquence in his books and you will perchance miss it, but meanwhile you will find that it has kindled all your thoughts. . . . A diction at once so rich and so homely as his I know not where to match in these days of writing by the page; it is like homespun cloth-of-gold."

Another shrewd testimony I will add from the columns of *The British Weekly*, written by P. G. Hamerton: "Emerson had at one time a great influence on me that was good in some ways, but not in all. His philosophy is stimulating and encouraging, but not quite true, because it is too optimistic for real truth. He encourages young readers in the desire to be themselves and develop their own faculties, which is very good, but at the same time he encourages a degree of self-confidence which is not always good either for young people or old ones."

*The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, by Oliver Wendell Holmes, is one of the most delightful books ever written. The author

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may be said to have invented a peculiar species of dramatic essay. The late W. J. Stillman, a journalist who knew everybody, said: "Of the three men whom I have personally known in the world who seemed most satisfied with what fate and fortune had made them—viz., Gladstone, Professor Freeman, and Holmes—I think Holmes enjoyed himself the most."

## *More Essays and Belles Lettres*

### II

#### MORE ESSAYS AND BELLES LETTRES



CARLYLE

EVERY library should contain at least one volume of Carlyle. "Everyman's Library" contains *Sartor Resartus* and *Heroes and Hero Worship*. It includes also *Past and Present*. These are excellent books, but on the whole I advise the reader to begin with Carlyle's *Essays*. They appear in two volumes, with a note by J. Russell Lowell. Most of them were written in the days when Carlyle was much repressed by editors and before the more startling peculiarities of his style were developed. Carlyle complained angrily that Lord Jeffrey mutilated his *Essays*. It is a curious fact that

## *More Essays and Belles Lettres*

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when Carlyle came to reprint in volume form the essays published originally by Jeffrey, he allowed Jeffrey's emendations to stand. At least, this is true of several which I have carefully compared. There can be little doubt that the best of the essays, and one of the best critical essays ever written, was Carlyle on Burns—the first sympathetic interpretation which the illustrious poet ever received.\* Dr. Garnett, who was not rhetorical, says: "The Essay on Burns is the very voice of Scotland, expressive of all her passionate love and tragic sorrow for her darling son. It has paragraphs of massy gold, capable of being beaten out into volumes, as indeed they have been. Unlike some of Carlyle's essays, it is by no means open to the charge of mysticism, but is distinguished by the soundest good sense."

### MACAULAY

It will be necessary to add the two volumes of Macaulay's *Miscellaneous Essays*.

## *More Essays and Belles Lettres*

This is the time when all critical estimates are being revised and men are disputing boldly the accepted doctrines. So I venture to say that Macaulay occupies a unique position among essayists and biographers. Perhaps I might also say that the best of his writings are his first and his last. I refer to the Essay on Milton and the Life of Pitt in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Macaulay came to think that his Essay on Milton was loaded with gaudy and ungraceful ornaments. This may be, but it is an astonishing production, and the young heart that does not kindle to it is cold indeed. The short *Life of Pitt* is a masterpiece of consummate skill. The music and melody of it, the exquisite art with which the paragraphs are fitted to each other, the satisfying impression of the whole, are simply beyond praise. Perhaps no one has written better about Macaulay than John Morley. He says: "His *Essays* are as good as a library: they make an incomparable manual and *vade mecum* for a busy, uneducated man

## *More Essays and Belles Lettres*

who has curiosity and enlightenment enough to wish to know a little about the great lives and great thoughts, the shining words and many-coloured complexities of action that have marked the journey of man through the ages. Macaulay has an intimate acquaintance both with the imaginative literature and the history of Greece and Rome, with the literature and the history of modern Italy, of France, and of England. Whatever his special subject, he contrives to pour into it with singular dexterity a stream of rich, graphic, and telling illustrations from all these widely diversified sources." All this is well said, but Morley leaves out what is the chief attraction of Macaulay—the glowing fire of his heart.

There is no doubt another side to this. It is pleasant to find Matthew Arnold doing justice to the Essay on Milton. He says: "With the Essay on Milton began Macaulay's career, and, brilliant as the career was, it had few points more brilliant than this beginning." Arnold states as well

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as any one the objections and deductions to be made in criticising Macaulay : " A style to dazzle, to gain admirers everywhere, to attract imitators in multitude ! A style brilliant, metallic, exterior ; making strong points, alternating invective with eulogy, wrapping in a robe of rhetoric the thing it represents ; not, with the soft play of life, following and rendering the thing's very form and pressure. For, indeed, in rendering things in this fashion, Macaulay's gift did not lie."

This is well enough. But Macaulay is safe, and it is true of him that he created the historical essay. Through the door he has opened we can, any one of us, pass into the great world of politics, history and literature. No one has influenced English style as Macaulay has done, and, on the whole, the influence has made for clarity and for vigour. I may add, for those who can afford expensive editions, that Macaulay's *Essays* have been published in three volumes, I think, by Messrs. Methuen, with introductions by Professor Montague. I have no hesitation

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in saying that this is the best edited English classic I know—not a word too much, not a word too little.

## FICTION.

I now come to the great and not altogether easy subject of fiction. We have in English a huge library, but only a certain number are elevated above the mass. I propose to give only books from the greatest writers, and in choosing them I have to think of the qualities which attract new readers. If one book fascinates, the other books will be read in due time. Thus, I do not recommend *Romola* or even *Middlemarch* for George Eliot because, whatever difference of opinion there may be as to their merits, it will be allowed that they are not easy reading for the beginner.

## SCOTT

The master novelist is Sir Walter Scott,

and four at least of his books should find a place. But what four? Lowell once said that the *Bride of Lammermoor* was to him the most beautiful story in the language. Andrew Lang on one occasion put *Old Mortality* and *Quentin Durward* at the top of the list, but I rather think that he slightly changed this opinion. Excellent judges like George Gilfillan have chosen *Guy Manner- ing* for the premier position. For my own part I prefer *Rob Roy* to the rest. *The Anti- quary* was Scott's own favourite. The one novel to which I have never been quite reconciled is *St. Ronan's Well*, and yet we all remember how it was admired by Ruskin. On the whole I advise beginning with *Ivanhoe*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *The Antiquary*, and *Rob Roy*. I do not forget that Lord Tennyson put *Old Mortality* before *The Heart of Midlothian*, and I know there are some curious lapses in *The Heart of Midlothian*, and the last third is unsatisfactory. But I agree with Fitzgerald: "Oh, how refreshing is the leisurely, easy

movement of the story, with its true and well-harmonised variety of scene and character ! ” As for *Ivanhoe*, they say there are many historical inaccuracies and errors in its pages. But what does it matter ? Andrew Lang says : “ *Ivanhoe* is such a very dear and old friend that no one who has ever been a boy can pretend to apply to it any stern critical tests.” Leslie Stephen, who was not an indiscriminating admirer of Scott, speaks of its splendid audacity, its vivid presentation of mediæval life, and the dramatic vigour of the narrative.

### JANE AUSTEN

Jane Austen comes next, and her vitality is supreme. What may be said against her has been said by Charlotte Brontë, writing about *Pride and Prejudice* : “ What did I find ? An accurate daguerreotyped portrait of a commonplace face ; a carefully fenced, high-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers ; but no glance of a bright, vivid physiognomy, no open country,

no fresh air, no blue hill, no 'bohny beck.' I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses." On the other hand, Scott said in his diary: "Read again, and for the third time at least, Miss Austen's very finely written novel of *Pride and Prejudice*. That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. 'The big Bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exhaustive touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me. What a pity such a gifted creature died so early!" Macaulay writes: "Read *Northanger Abbey*; worth all Dickens and Pliny together. Yet it was the work of a girl. She was certainly not more than twenty-six. Wonderful creature!"

I put *Emma* first. Mrs. Oliphant, in her very acute criticism, says that Jane Austen

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was only about twenty in her sheltered and happy life at home in the end of the old century, when she wrote what might have been the outcome of the profoundest prolonged observation and study of mankind—what is, we think, the most perfect of all her works—*Pride and Prejudice*. But Mrs. Oliphant admits that *Emma*, perhaps, is the work upon which most suffrages would meet as the most perfect of all her performances.

I think we may safely put down *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* to begin with. The others must be read in turn, but we are at the commencement of our work. By the way, Lord Iddesleigh, the famous politician, made the proposal that a magazine should be started which should be devoted entirely to Miss Austen, and to which only her sincere admirers should be allowed to contribute.

## DICKENS

I now pass on to the great novelist who has been honoured in this manner. That excellent periodical, the *Dickensian*, of

which I religiously read every word, is wholly devoted to Charles Dickens, who takes his place as one of the very few masters of English fiction, and to him we must devote a certain space.

In his masterly criticism of Dickens Mr. G. K. Chesterton distinguishes well between the two periods of Dickens. The first period included *Pickwick*, which Frederic Harrison describes as "his first, his best, his inimitable triumph." Then comes *Nicolas Nickleby*, which conquered Sydney Smith: "'Nickleby is very good. I stood out against Mr. Dickens as long as I could, but he has conquered me.'" I pass over *Barnaby Rudge*, and, with more hesitation, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and come to *Martin Chuzzlewit*, one of the first of his compositions. Then I proceed to *David Copperfield*, which Dickens himself put above the rest. "What a pleasure," says Matthew Arnold, "to have the opportunity of praising a work so sound, a work so rich in merits, as *David Copperfield*! . . . What

treasures of gaiety, invention, life, are in that book! what alertness and resource! what a soul of good nature and kindness governing the whole!" Andrew Lang says that "*David Copperfield* no doubt is Dickens's masterpiece as a novel, *Pickwick*, as has been said, being no novel, but merely an isolated phenomenon. . . . The entire charm of '*Copperfield*' was never recaptured by Dickens." Swinburne said in his last essay on Dickens in the *Quarterly*, "In that unequal and irregular masterpiece his comic and his tragic genius rose now and then to the very highest pitch of all."

We need not deal with the novels of the second period and their great and varied excellence. They want something, but they contain much. The reader is advised to include in his library *Pickwick*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *David Copperfield*. These contain much of the best work of Dickens, but there is not one book of Dickens that can be safely neglected. I should personally give a very high place to

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## Fiction

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*A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*. But, strange to say, there is a difference of opinion among good judges, especially about the former. Of all the brutal reviews that have disgraced English literature, and there are many, the most brutal and stupid by far was the criticism of *A Tale of Two Cities* published in the *Saturday Review* and written by Fitzjames Stephen.

### THACKERAY

I pass on to another writer of the first eminence—W. M. Thackeray, Thackeray has had his detractors. One of them was W. E. Henley, who complained that, “*Esmond* apart, there is scarce a man or a woman in Thackeray whom it is possible to love unreservedly or thoroughly respect. That gives the measure of the man, and determines the quality of his influence.” But Henley admitted that Thackeray was a rare artist in words and therefore a great writer. “Setting aside Cardinal Newman’s, the style he wrote is certainly less open to

criticism than that of any other modern Englishman. He was neither super-eloquent like Mr. Ruskin, nor a Germanised Jeremy like Carlyle: he was not marmoreally emphatic as Landor was, nor was he slovenly and inexpressive as was the great Sir Walter; he neither dallied with antithesis like Macaulay nor rioted in verbal vulgarisms with Dickens; he abstained from technology and what may be called Lord Burleighism as carefully as George Eliot indulged in them, and he avoided conceits as sedulously as Mr. George Meredith goes out of his way to hunt for them. He is a better writer than any one of these, in that he is always a master of speech and of himself, and that he is always careful yet natural, and choice yet seemingly spontaneous."

Thackeray was all this and a great deal more. He was a novelist of the foremost rank, but readers must be careful in their approach to him. For example, it is probably true that Thackeray never did any-

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## Fiction.

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thing more remarkable than *Barry Lyndon*, but *Barry Lyndon* is not a book to begin with. I think we must choose *Vanity Fair*. "The most brilliant, the most heartless, and the most hateful of modern fictions!"—this is how a leading novelist describes it. But Dr. John Brown was right when he called it Thackeray's greatest work and one of the chief masterpieces of genius in any language. Charlotte Brontë's passionate admiration for the story may be recalled. Speaking of the last number of *Vanity Fair*, she writes: "Forcible, exciting in its force, still more impressive than exciting, carrying on the interest of the narrative in a flow, deep, full, resistless, it is still quiet—as quiet as reflection, as quiet as memory; and to me there are parts of it that sound as solemn as an oracle."

By the way, I do not know any reference by Charlotte Brontë to the earlier books of Thackeray, though it is possible she may have read them. Mr. W. D. Howells is almost alone in describing *Vanity Fair* as

“ the poorest of Thackeray’s novels, crude, heavy-handed, caricatured.”

Next to *Vanity Fair* I should be inclined to name *The Newcomes*. It is by far the most genial of the author’s works, and he wrote it at the height of his great powers. It reveals the very best side of Thackeray. It fills a large canvas with the greatest ease, and is perhaps the best of all the novels of manners.

There is one other book of Thackeray I must name, and that is *Henry Esmond*. There are dissentients from this judgment. Gilfillan speaks of “ such dull mimicry of the past as is to be found in *Esmond*.” And there is a certain truth in this—put very neatly by Taine, who says, “ Thackeray has not written a less popular nor a more beautiful story.” *Esmond* reproduced with perfect accuracy the style in which men wrote and talked in the days of Queen Anne. Even though it may be difficult at first, the reader should by all means persevere. I am scarcely bold enough to

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follow an American example and recommend that *Henry Esmond* should be read if possible at a sitting, though I grant that its completeness as a whole will be felt best in that way. But it is not an easy book, though it is a very great book. And so I recommend readers to begin with *Vanity Fair* or with *The Newcomes* and take *Henry Esmond* last. Even a five-pound library cannot dispense with *Esmond*. We have thus three books of Thackeray.

III

MORE FICTION

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

IT is now the turn of Charlotte Brontë. Charlotte Brontë published her first novel, *Jane Eyre*, in 1847. As soon as it appeared judgment was taken out of the hands of the critics. The hold it took and the impulse it gave were almost unparalleled in literature. "It is easy," says Mr. Birrell, "to understand the great interest and excitement such a tale at once created. Most books are born dead, and it is always a startling moment when you first discover that you are holding an exception in your hands. *Jane Eyre* was a live coal dropped by some unknown hand—from some unknown quarter—amongst the literary coteries and 'log-

rollers.' There was no mistake about it, here was a book at first hand." This fever continued to rage for years. *Jane Eyre* left *Vanity Fair* far behind in popularity. J. G. Lockhart, then a veteran among critics, said, "I have finished the adventures of Miss Jane Eyre, and think her far the cleverest that has written since Austen and Edgeworth were in their prime. Worth fifty Trollopes and Martineaus rolled into one counterpane, with fifty Dickenses and Bulwers to keep them company—but rather a brazen Miss." Strange to say, George Eliot judged unfavourably. She admitted that the book was interesting, but she wished the characters "would talk a little less like the heroes and heroines of police reports."

It is not worth while to recall the vicious and violent attacks made upon the writer from the standpoint of the Pharisee. There are good critics like Dr. Saintsbury who do not think that the book improves or holds its ground very well. But the truest thing said of the book is perhaps the judgment of

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Frederic Harrison : " Of Charlotte's work it is *Jane Eyre* only that can be called a masterpiece. . . . With all its fault, its narrowness of range, its occasional extravagances, *Jane Eyre* will long be remembered as one of the most creative influences of the Victorian literature, one of the most poetic pieces of English romance, and among the most vivid masterpieces in the rare order of literary ' Confessions.' " Swinburne, writing in his clumsiest manner, insists that the inevitability of the book is its great quality. He attributes to Charlotte Brontë " the power to make us feel in every nerve, at every step forward which our imagination is compelled to take under the guidance of another's, that thus and not otherwise, but in all things altogether even as we are told and shown, it was and it must have been with the human figures set before us in their action and their suffering ; that thus and not otherwise they absolutely must and would have felt and thought and spoken under the proposed conditions."

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I pass over *Shirley*, though it is my favourite among her novels. It is a happy and even a buoyant book. There is an explanation of this which yields itself to a study of Mrs. Gaskell's biography. But I admit that good critics and the public generally put it lower than *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*.

*Villette*, according to the majority of critics, is the finest, the most delicate, the ripest, and the wisest of all Charlotte Brontë's books. Certainly it describes the very heart-beats of the writer. The autobiographical element is stronger in it than in any other of her volumes.

The Brontë novel I read first was *The Professor*, which was published after her death. "It was," says Swinburne, a "diffident, uncertain dawn." Mr. Birrell speaks of it contemptuously. I venture to disagree. There is a letter in *The Professor* which in itself is worth the majority of complete novels. It is with the two or three first-rate letters in fiction. But *The Professor* has not yet found its true appreciator.

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Let me be content then with recommending to my readers *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. Charlotte Brontë is the chief novelist of love, and she has more glow than any other. "She is intensely true, and draws from actual life—cost what it may, and in that little remote village of hers, a village as it seems of a hundred years back, facts came to light of a frightful, unmitigated force; events accompanied them, burning with a lurid glow, and setting their very hearts on fire. She is like her books, and her life explains much in them which needs explanation." I accept Mr. A. C. Benson's judgment, "The first of women writers of every age."

### GEORGE ELIOT

We come to George Eliot, and it must be admitted at once that her vogue has greatly declined. It is very difficult to discover a eulogy of her in the criticisms of recent years. But she had a great

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day. Her popularity was immense, and she had the whole-hearted suffrages of critics and experts like R. H. Hutton. Hutton came to write of her with a rapture and a reverence which were very wonderful.

For my part I choose among her books the first, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, then *Adam Bede*, and then *Silas Marner*. *Scenes of Clerical Life* appealed to me as wonderfully moving when I first read them. Dickens himself came forward to express his admiration of the first two—all he had read. He said, “I have been so strongly affected by the two first tales in the book you have had the kindness to send me, through Messrs. Blackwood, that I hope you will excuse my writing to you to express my admiration of their extraordinary merit. The exquisite truth and delicacy both of the humour and the pathos of these stories I have never seen the like of, and they have impressed me in a manner that I should find it very difficult to describe to you, if I had the impertinence to try.” Even J. A. Froude

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was moved by the book, and wrote : " I do not know whether I am addressing a young man or an old, clergyman or a layman. Perhaps if you answer this note you may give us some information about yourself. But at any rate, should business or pleasure bring you into this part of the world, pray believe that you will find a warm welcome if you will accept our hospitality."

By the way, Mr. Benn in his *History of Rationalism* mentions *Janet's Repentance* as one of the greatest of rationalistic books. Dr. Marcus Dods reckoned it as one of the hundred best religious books. Let the reader test the matter by perusing the story.

Next comes *Adam Bede*, which had an immense popular success. It is still the book on which her popular reputation mainly rests. That it is a very great book is most certain. " I love it very much," wrote the author, " and am deeply thankful to have written it." A good critic has said, " It is of all her books the heartiest, the wittiest, the most cheerful, or, rather, the least de-

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pressing. It was a typical romance which everything she had thought or known impelled her to write, in which she told the best of what she had seen, and the most important of what she had to say. Had she never written anything but *Adam Bede* she would have had a special place of her own in English romance—and I am not sure that anything else which she produced very materially raised, enlarged, or qualified that place.” This I take to be a true characterisation.

I pass over *The Mill on the Floss*, excellent as it is, and come to *Silas Marner*. It has the great merit of brevity. As Henry James wrote in his youth, “It holds a higher place than any of the author’s works. It is more nearly a masterpiece; it has more of that simple, rounded, consummate aspect, that absence of loose ends and gaping issues which marks a classical work.” It is indeed a perfect gem. There is nothing to which we can take exception and much that is almost Shakespearean in quality. *Adam Bede* is

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spoilt to some extent by the story of Hetty's respite, which is thoroughly untrue to facts. But everything in *Silas Marner* is as it should be. Above all, it lacks the heaviness which, as her essays show, was in George Eliot—a heaviness which almost extinguished her genius ere the end came.

So, then, I recommend from George Eliot *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, and *Silas Marner*. The appreciative reader may go on to *Romola*, which is a great achievement, but not alive. It is learned, it is powerful, it is ambitious in the highest degree. It is often admirable. And yet it does not move. We may also pass over *Felix Holt*, though Mr. Lyon does a great deal to redeem it. *Middlemarch* is an encyclopædia rather than a novel. It came out in parts, and I remember reviewing each part as it appeared, but I should not willingly go through it again, excellent as many parts undoubtedly are.

Of *Daniel Deronda* there is little to say. A few good judges have praised it, but it is

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laborious. In order to write it George Eliot read through two hundred books. It may be that George Eliot made a fine defence of the Jews in the volume, but this is not satisfying. Still, let it be said that the aged and famous American novelist, Harriet Beecher Stowe, took pleasure in it. She said it had succeeded in "awakening in my somewhat worn-out mind an interest." And, if I mistake not, Mr. Oscar Browning places the book at the head of her works. Neither her essays nor her verses count for anything.

## NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Among the many admirable novelists of America the acknowledged supremacy belongs to Nathaniel Hawthorne. He died at sixty and did not write very much. But *The Scarlet Letter* at least and *The Blithedale Romance* must be read for ever. Exquisite and ethereal are adjectives which fit him. But there was another side of his genius.

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That acute French critic, Emile Montégut, shows real insight when he says: "This marked love of cases of conscience, this tactiturn, scornful cast of mind; this habit of seeing sin everywhere, and hell always gaping open; this dusky gaze bent always upon a damned world, and a nature draped in mourning; these lonely conversations of the imagination with the conscience; this pitiless analysis resulting from a perpetual examination of one's self, and from the tortures of a heart closed before men and open to God—all these elements of the Puritan character have passed into Mr. Hawthorne, or, to speak more justly, have filtered into him, through a long succession of generations."

This applies particularly to *The Scarlet Letter*. It is little to say that the style is perfect. It does not perhaps captivate, but it takes one captive. Henry James was right when he said that it is "densely dark, with a single spot of vivid colour in it; and it will probably long remain the most consistently

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gloomy of English novels of the first order. But I just now called it the author's masterpiece, and I imagine it will continue to be, for other generations than ours, his most substantial title to fame. It expresses the power, the mystery, and the deathless judicial zeal which are inseparable elements of the human conscience."

*The House of the Seven Gables* is a very fine piece of powerful and imaginative prose. But I prefer *The Blithedale Romance*, and am sometimes inclined to agree with Mr. Howells that it stands first. It is, to my thinking, the most beautifully written story in the English language. Longfellow said: "Another characteristic of this writer is the exceeding beauty of his style. It is as clear as running waters are. Indeed, he uses words merely as stepping-stones upon which, with a free and youthful bound, he crosses and recrosses the bright and rushing stream of thought." No wonder that Dora Greenwell said, "I am altogether entranced with Hawthorne." George Eliot said, "Haw-

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Thorne is a grand favourite of mine, and I shall be sorry if he do not go on surpassing himself." "The greatest writer in prose fiction whom America has produced" is the verdict of Andrew Lang, and it still holds.

*The Scarlet Letter* and *The Blithedale Romance* are the choicest products of Hawthorne's great, lonely, and touching genius.

### ANTHONY TROLLOPE

I suppose it must be allowed that Anthony Trollope, great as he is, belongs to the second rank, though I know very good judges have placed him in the first. Perhaps he lacked that imagination and poetry which lift a book above the fluctuations of taste. In his own way, however, there was no one to surpass him. Personally he was boisterous, combative and ebullient. But there was deep kindness in him and a habit of searching observation, the results of which are almost startling.

Unquestionably his Barchester series is

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by far the best of his many books. He could not write anything but fiction. His criticisms are pedestrian in the extreme, and he had none of the biographer's gift. But as a realist in the best sense, as a matchless painter of nineteenth-century Englishmen, he is hardly rivalled. He kept on writing to the end, and his later books are sadly inferior to their predecessors. It is difficult to make a choice. But I think I am safe in recommending *Barchester Towers*, *Doctor Thorne*, *Framley Parsonage*, and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* as the choicest of his books. If one is compelled to a narrow choice, then I name *Barchester Towers* and *The Last Chronicle of Barset*. After *The Last Chronicle* he wrote nothing that will live, though he remained readable perhaps even to the last.

## R. D. BLACKMORE

R. D. Blackmore was a man of one book, *Lorna Doone*. He was an accomplished scholar, and not a mean poet, and almost

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every thing he wrote had a certain quality. Even his first novel, *Clara Vaughan*, which was very highly esteemed, contained some excellent dramatic and sensational passages. But *Lorna Doone* is a book by itself. It is full of interest, and it has an atmosphere in a high degree. It may be true that it is a lovable story rather than a great story, but lovable books are few. Dr. Saintsbury's summary is good: "A style racy and quaint, without excessive affectation; a good old-fashioned scholarship; a perpetual turn of humor; a store of English patriotism, sense, and sanity—these are some of the good things which Mr. Blackmore always gives us."

## DEFOE

As I am choosing only about a hundred books from the vast multitude, I do not attempt to select from the older novelists, who were perhaps the greatest masters of all. But I must put in my list Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Rousseau says

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of it in his *Emile*: “My *Emile* shall read this book before any other; it shall for a long time be his entire library, and shall always hold an honourable place. It shall be the text on which all our discussions of natural science shall be only commentaries. It shall be a test for all we meet during our progress toward a ripened judgment, and so long as our taste is unspoiled we shall enjoy reading it.” Dr. Johnson put it among the three books that its readers wish to be longer. They are *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The critics of our own day are much of the same mind. In his book on the English novel Sir Walter Raleigh says that “the main piece of original narrative is a masterpiece, and marks a new era in the writing of prose fiction.”

### SWIFT

*Robinson Crusoe* did not reach its position for some years, but when Dean Swift published his *Gulliver’s Travels* people of taste

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ran mad about it. So Lady Mary Wortley Montagu tells us in one of her letters. We learn from John Gay that the first impression sold in a week, and I suppose there is no appeal from the judgment of Coleridge : " I think *Gulliver's Travels* the great work of Swift." The object of the author, as set out by himself, was to vex the world, and readers may satisfy themselves with the first two voyages. There is a ghastly significance about much of it, but so long as the satire does not predominate the book may be read for the story, and found to be what it is—a consummate masterpiece of narrative

## IV

## POETRY

POETRY is most accessible to the ordinary reader in the form of lyrics. I take leave, therefore, to recommend anthologies as an essential part of such a library as I am contemplating. One anthology bids fair to hold its ground. I mean *Palgrave's Golden Treasury* of the best songs and lyrical poems in the English language. It was originally published in 1861, and its merits obtained universal recognition. Tennyson, whose critical taste was excellent, gave Palgrave help in its preparation. Much has been written since 1861, and the Oxford University Press issue, in their cheap and excellent series, the "World's Classics," an edition of the *Golden Treasury* which contains 160 pages of additional poems by

Fitzgerald, 'Tennyson, the Brownings, Arnold, and other modern poets. This is a golden volume, and I do not wonder that a new edition is printed every year, even in war time. I should also strongly recommend the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, edited by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. But the price runs away with a good deal of our allotted sum. It is, however, among the best anthologies in print, and readers who have any taste for poetry will find their account in possessing it.

I have already recommended the Globe edition of Shakespeare, published by Macmillan. Some readers, however, may prefer the "World's Classics" publication, in nine volumes. This contains the Oxford text edited by that very careful student, the late Mr. W. J. Craig, and there are introductory studies of the various plays by Edward Dowden, who is always clear, scholarly and informed. The general introduction by Algernon Charles Swinburne is comparatively slight, and so is a note by Theodore

Watts-Dunton on the typographical and other features of this edition. Anyhow, it is an excellent edition, and will satisfy the need of ordinary students.

Of *Milton's Poems*, which are indispensable, the best available edition at a low price is that in the "World's Classics." It is a reprint of the English poems from the Oxford edition of H. C. Beeching, with modernised spelling. Dean Beeching is an accomplished master of English literature, and all his work is highly wrought. I will add only one thing. Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes, of the Supreme Court of the United States, told me that one winter in Boston, when he and his wife were obliged to keep to the house through ill-health, they read together aloud some of the English poets. Of these Milton stood the test of reading much better than the others. I therefore venture to suggest that to appreciate Milton it may be wise to call in a friend, so that his harmonies may be duly appreciated. Reading a poet aloud is a severe test of his

mèrits, but Milton will bear that test and any other.

ROBERT BURNS

True to our principle that lyrical poetry is the most easily appreciated, I come to the illustrious name of Robert Burns. "Destiny—for so in our ignorance we must speak—his faults, the faults of others, proved too hard for him ; and that spirit, which might have soared could it but have walked, soon sank to the dust, its glorious faculties trodden under foot in the blossom, and died, we might almost say, without ever having lived. And so kind and warm a soul, so full of inborn riches, of love of all living and lifeless things ! " So speaks Carlyle.

Burns is the favourite of the whole world. No poet has been so minutely and lovingly studied. I think it is true that he is the only poet of the first rank who has ever been really popular in modern times. All praise of him seems inadequate, even the most eloquent. Let me quote from Emerson :—

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“How true a poet is he ! and the poet, too, of poor men, of grey hodden and the guernsey coat and the blouse. He has given voice to all the experiences of common life ; he has endeared the farmhouse and cottage, patches and poverty, beans and barley ; ale, the poor man’s wine ; hardship ; the fear of debt ; the dear society of weans and wife, of brothers and sisters, proud of each other, knowing so few, and finding amends for want and obscurity in books and thoughts. . . . As he was thus the poet of the poor, anxious, cheerful, working humanity, so had he the language of low life. He grew up in a rural district, speaking a *patois* unintelligible to all but natives, and he has made the Lowland Scotch a Doric dialect of fame. It is the only example in history of a language made classic by the genius of a single man.”

It is needless to say more in the case of a poet whose reputation grows and whose readers increase from year to year. An excellent edition is that in the “World’s

## • *Poetry*

Classics"—the *Poetical Works of Burns*, complete, with the poet's notes, a glossary, and index of first lines.

### WORDSWORTH

I now come to poets who must be read at first in selections. First I name William Wordsworth. The complete editions of his poetical works run into several volumes. But there is much in Wordsworth that may be safely omitted at the start. The general view of his character has been altered in some respects by recent discoveries, but there is something magnificent in Wordsworth's serenity and patience. He waited for recognition, and recognition came in ample measure. He was inspired no doubt, but partially and unequally inspired. Matthew Arnold says: "Although Jeffrey completely failed to recognise Wordsworth's real greatness, he was yet not wrong in saying of the 'Excursion,' as a work of poetic style, 'This will never do.'" The "Prelude" is occasionally prosaic, but has

fine passages. As a sonneteer, however, Wordsworth can be praised almost without reserve in his best pieces. It was he who brought the sonnet to its place of honour. Arthur Quiller-Couch says: "On the response of the common conscience of men Wordsworth's sonnets may rely for their perpetual justification."

On many readers Wordsworth's poems have had a profound moral influence. John Stuart Mill, in his autobiography, writes: "What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine for my state of mind was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, under the excitement of beauty. They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in all by human beings, which had no connection with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. From them I

seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence."

And others can speak, though perhaps in different terms, of what Wordsworth did for them in the day of their calamity and perplexity. Perhaps Sir William Watson may speak for all such :—

" From Shelley's dazzling glow or thunderous haze,  
From Byron's tempest-anger, tempest mirth,  
Men turned to thee and found—not blast and blaze,  
Tumult of tottering heavens, but peace on earth.  
Nor peace that grows by Lethe, scentless flower,  
There in white languors to decline and cease ;  
But peace whose names are also rapture, power,  
Clear sight and love : for these are parts of peace."

In the " World's Classics " will be found an excellent selection from the *Poems of Wordsworth*, with indexes of titles and first lines.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

" Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the day-spring of thy fancies, with

hope like a fiery column before thee—the dark pillar not yet turned—Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Logican, Metaphysician, Bard!” So Charles Lamb summons the ‘dearest of his friends. Coleridge wrote perhaps not much that will live, and many of his years were barren, but the judgment of Mr. Swinburne will stand, and it will bear repeated examination:—

“As a poet his place is indisputable. It is high among the highest of all time. An age that should forget or neglect him might neglect or forget any poet that ever lived. At least, any poet whom it did remember such an age would remember as something other than a poet; it would prize and praise in him, not the absolute and distinctive quality, but something empirical or accidental. That may be said of this one which can hardly be said of any but the greatest among men; that come what may to the world in course of time, it will never see his place filled. Other and stronger men, with fuller control and con-

centration of genius, may do more service, may bear more fruit; but such as his was they will not have in them to give. The highest lyric work is either passionate or imaginative; of passion Coleridge's has nothing; but for height and perfection of imaginative quality he is the greatest of lyric poets. This was his special power, and this is his special praise."

I mention Mr. Swinburne's essay in the third volume of Chambers's *Cyclopædia of English Literature* as his final verdict on Coleridge. Practically all of Coleridge's poetry that will live may be found in the volume of selections in the "World's Classics"—the *Poems of Coleridge*, with an introduction by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch.

### BYRON

"We talked of Byron and Wordsworth," says Tennyson's son in his biography of the Laureate. "Of course," said Tennyson, "Byron's merits are on the surface. This is not the case with Wordsworth. You must

love Wordsworth ere he will seem worthy of your love. As a boy I was an enormous admirer of Byron, so much so that I got a surfeit of him, and now I cannot read him as I should like to do. I was fourteen when I heard of his death. It seemed an awful calamity; I remember I rushed out of doors, sat down by myself, shouted aloud, and wrote on the sandstone: '*Byron is dead!*'" Even surly young Carlyle was moved at this passing: "Poor Byron! alas, poor Byron! the news of his death came upon my heart like a man of lead; and yet, the thought of it sends a painful twinge through all my being, as if I had lost a brother. O God! that so many souls of mud and clay should fill up their base existence to its utmost bound; and this the noblest spirit in Europe should sink before half his course was run."

The impression made by Byron's life and death is almost unparalleled, but he does not now hold his ground. His star is fast waning, and it is not likely that a

change will come. But Byron must be read, in part at least, by all students of literature. Tennyson, in later life, could read the "Vision of Judgment" and parts of "Childe Harold," but though he thought Byron endlessly clever and unduly appreciated, he refused to style him an artist or a thinker or a creator. Again I recommend the selection in the "World's Classics" series—the *Poems of Byron*, a selection, with indexes of titles and first lines.

### KEATS

John Keats was born on October 31, 1795, and he died in Rome on February 23, 1821. If these dates are duly considered, the achievement of Keats will be seen to be a miracle. When he died his lungs were gone, and all through his short life he was oppressed by illness. I never go through Well Walk at Hampstead without remembering how Keats was once sitting on a bench there when Leigh Hunt came up to him. He told Hunt, with tears in his eyes,

that his heart was breaking. Not that he was a coward. He was, on the contrary, a very brave man, and fought an unflinching fight against his enemies. "He would have been among the very greatest of us if he had lived," said Tennyson. "There is something of the innermost soul of poetry in almost everything he ever wrote." It has been well said that he was the most Shakespearian spirit that has lived since Shakespeare. But whatever he might have been, we know what he was. What he has left us puts him irrevocably in the first rank of the poets of all time. The "World's Claassics" include the *Poetical Works of Keats* complete.

#### SHELLEY

The same may be said of Percy Bysshe Shelley, who is even more studied in these days than Keats. This may be because the circumstances of his life were more complicated and present various problems to those who think that they are entitled to

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judge moral character. The fact is there was a great contradiction in Shelley. On one side of him he was a frail, ethereal, dreamy spirit. On the other side he was strong, practical, and sometimes harsh. I again invoke the aid of Sir William Watson :

“A creature of impetuous breath,  
Our torpor deadlier than death  
He knew not; whatso'er he saith  
Flashes with life.  
He spurreth man, he quickeneth  
To splendid strife.  
And in his gusts of song he brings  
Wild odours shaken from strange wings,  
And unfamiliar whisperings  
From far lips blown,  
While all the rapturous heart of things  
Throbs through his own.”

Again, selections of the *Poems of Shelley* will be found in the “World's Classics.”

## LONGFELLOW

I decided to say a word about the American poet, Longfellow, who, as it seems to me, is very much underrated by certain critics. He is one of the most

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popular of all poets, one of the most easily read and understood. There is a tendency to sneer at such poets, and it must of course be admitted that some of Longfellow's weakest verses were the most popular. In 1889 Andrew Lang wrote: "I have not read much in him for twenty years. I take him up to-day, and what a flood of memory his music brings with it! To me it is like a sad autumn wind blowing over the woods, blowing over the empty fields, bringing the scents of October, the song of a belated bird, and here and there a red leaf from the tree. There is that autumnal sense of things fair and far behind in his poetry, or, if it is not there, his poetry stirs it in our forsaken lodges of the past. Yes, it comes to one out of one's boyhood; it breathes of a world very vaguely realised—a world of imitative sentiments and forebodings of hours to come. Perhaps Longfellow first woke me to that later sense of what poetry means, which comes with early manhood." It should be remembered also that Henley,

hétérodox in so many things, was a warm admirer of Longfellow.

*Longfellow's Poetical Works* are published in the "World's Classics" in two volumes.

### TENNYSON AND BROWNING

I do not need to say anything of the poets who are well known and so nearly contemporary as Tennyson. Nor is it necessary to write about Browning. Some knowledge of both is essential to a student of poetry. It will be sufficient to mention the selection *Poems of Tennyson*, 1830-1865, which is published in the "World's Classics" and runs to 600 pages. The same series contains the *Poems of Robert Browning*, 1833-1864, in two volumes. Much copyright matter of both poets still belongs to the publishers. Mr. Murray has the Browning books and Messrs. Macmillan have the Tennyson books. They are issued in very convenient forms, but a little beyond the cheap price which we prefer.

I would also recommend in the "World's

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Classics" the *Poems of Matthew Arnold*, 1849-1867, with an introduction by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. Also the *Poems of Christina Rossetti*, and the *Poems of William Morris*, in the same series.

# , Biography •

## V

### BIOGRAPHY

To many of us biographies are the most attractive of books, and there are many sound and excellent specimens of this kind in English literature, but by universal consent two stand out as pre-cminent. I mean, of course, Boswell's *Life of Johnson* and Lockhart's *Life of Scott*.

#### BOSWELL'S "LIFE OF JOHNSON"

Boswell remains, and will remain, the prince of biographers. Many have spoken contemptuously of his quality and character. They have dwelt on Boswell's want of tact, on his amazing folly and egotism, on his want of self-respect, on his vanity, pomposity, and general looseness. All these

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may be allowed, but there is much more to say on the other side. Boswell was a man of genius and of good heart. He was a writer of original merit. As William Black says: "Johnson, Goldsmith, and all the rest of them are only ghosts until the pertinacious young laird of Auchinleck comes on the scene to give them colour, and life, and form." Leslie Stephen, who was a studious and successful practitioner of the biographical art, points out that Boswell has a little of the true Shakespearean secret. He never misses the point of a story. He gives just what is wanted to indicate character or to explain the full meaning of a repartee. He has an amazing skill in extracting the essence of a conversation and in indicating the whole scheme by a few telling touches. "We are tempted to fancy that we have heard the very thing, and rashly infer that Boswell was simply the mechanical transmitter of the good things uttered. Any one who will try to put down the pith of a brilliant conversation within the same space

may soon satisfy himself of the absurdity of such a hypothesis, and will learn to appreciate Boswell's powers not only of memory but artistic representation. Such a feat implies not only admirable quickness of appreciation but a rare literary faculty. Boswell's accuracy is remarkable; but it is the least part of his merit."

To this it may be added that Boswell's own personality emerges from his book almost as clearly as the personality of his illustrious subject. It has been calculated that Boswell and Johnson were acquainted for about twenty years. During that time they met together for about three hundred days. But a great deal can be done in three hundred days if it be the object of the biographer to turn the conversation into rewarding channels. This is what Boswell did. He kept his end in view and hardly ever missed recording the experience of each day. He had long, solitary interviews with Dr. Johnson, and he met him in the society where his powers were most taxed, most

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responsive, and most brilliant. It hardly ever happened that silence fell between the two. Thousands of biographies have been written and attempts have been made here and there to give pages of conversation. This has been done, for example, by John Morley in his excellent *Life of Gladstone*, but the inferiority of Gladstone's talk to Johnson's talk is only too apparent! The day will come, I believe, when every biography will as a matter of course contain letters and conversations. The predestined biographer will give heed and take care that from every interview he bears something away. The reader who comes under the spell of Boswell will remain enthralled. Perhaps for those who find difficulty in getting into a book it will be best to begin with the record of Boswell's acquaintance with Johnson—that acquaintance which so speedily ripened into true and confidential friendship.

The most available edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* is the two-volume edition in "Everyman's Library."

## Biography

### • LOCKHART'S "LIFE OF SCOTT"

There comes next Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, and it is not easy to say which is the more delightful and satisfying of the two. I have no quarrel with any one who prefers Lockhart. Every fresh perusal increases one's sense of Lockhart's most skilful, entertaining and fascinating book. It is possible to contend with some plausibility that Lockhart gives too much space to discussing the connection between Scott and the Ballantynes. The truth is the connection was not creditable either to Scott or to his printers. Lockhart had a quarrel with the world and wrote much that was inexcusably bitter. In the *Life of Scott*, however, he rose into a high region, and I think that the careful reader will perceive that Lockhart restrained himself as far as he could. He was not completely successful, however, in his efforts, and this may be acknowledged without abating at all Lockhart's claim to rank with Boswell. Both were happy in

## Biography

having truly noble subjects, but it must be admitted that Johnson had the grander nature of the two, with idealisms and faiths to which Scott was not indeed a stranger, though far less at home than the beloved Doctor. No one who really understands Scott would wish to have Lockhart's biography diminished by one page. It must, however, be conceded sorrowfully that it is too long for modern tastes, and so I reluctantly recommend the judiciously abbreviated edition of Mr. Dent which appears in "Everyman's Library" in two volumes.

### CARLYLE'S "LIFE OF STERLING"

Carlyle's *Life of Sterling* can hardly be called a great biography. A great biography must deal with a great personality, and it cannot be said that Sterling's amiable and ineffectual character had any touch of grandeur. But it is agreed that, when allowance is made for this, Carlyle's bio-

## *Biography*

graphy is the most pleasant of all his books. Emerson said: "With all its blemish of pity and Philistinism and pessimism, it stands remarkable, a monument built by such hands—I will not say planned by such a mind, for the mind protested; but nevertheless the hands, obedient to the spirit, built it with the best they could bring in gratitude to helpful love whose sunlight had reached an imprisoned soul." Mrs. Oliphant was one of the staunchest of all Carlyle's friends and defenders, but she admits the real weakness of the book. She says: "I have always felt, notwithstanding a strong affection and admiration for Carlyle, that his *Life of Sterling* has in it a breath of Mephistopheles, something of the mocking, scornful spirit, satirically superior to all a young man's hereditary beliefs and with a careless pleasure in pursuing and stripping him of these but weakly founded non-individual religious views which had built up the outer fabric of his life, such as hurts the moral sense, wonderful as is the almost

## Biography

lyrical strain of its lament and praise." When all is said and done, there is more mildness and tenderness in the book than in any other written by its author.

Carlyle's *Life of Sterling* is included in the "World's Classics," with an introduction by Mark Rutherford.

### MRS. GASKELL'S "LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË"

A remarkably skilful and effective biography is Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. It is the work of a novelist, and the novelist's gifts never had a rarer opportunity than in the strange life of the great Yorkshire sisters. I can understand that objection may be taken to the book, and certainly its candour is remarkable. But though we have now more materials than Mrs. Gaskell could use in writing her work, her substantial soundness of judgment has on the whole been confirmed. The extreme care and artistry with which the book is

## ‘ *Religious Books*

compiled are really very wonderful. Charlotte Brontë was a woman of genius, and she was also a woman who took a high and lonely way. Through almost every step of the pilgrimage Mrs. Gaskell walked with intimacy and understanding. She did not indeed treat the great inward incident of Charlotte Brontë's life—her relations with M. Héger—and it is not quite certain how far she was qualified to do so. What she said, however, is generally beyond challenge. The best edition of Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* is that edited by Mr. Clement Shorter and published now by John Murray. But this runs away with some money, and so I advise the edition published in “Everyman's Library” and introduced by May Sinclair.

## RELIGIOUS BOOKS

I come to religious books, of which I shall name very few. The Bible is, of course,

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## • *Religious Books*

taken for granted, and I also take for granted the *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis.

### BUNYAN'S "PILGRIM'S PROGRESS"

A word upon Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*—also included in "Everyman's Library." Dr. Arnold of Rugby wrote: "*Pilgrim's Progress* seems to be a complete reflection of Scripture, with none of the rubbish of the theologians mixed up with it." Froude says: "His experience is so truly a human experience that Christians of every persuasion can identify themselves with him, and even those who regard Christianity itself as the natural outgrowth of the conscience and intellect, and yet desire to live nobly and make the best of themselves, can recognise familiar footprints in every step of Christian's journey." The purity, the plainness, and the soundness of Bunyan's prose have been abundantly recognised by those who understand. I do not know any more felicit-

## • Religious Books •

ous characterisation than that of John Richard Green. He writes : " It is in this amazing reality of impersonation that Bunyan's imaginative genius specially displays itself. But this is far from being his only excellence. In its range, in its directness, in its simple grace, in the ease with which it changes from living dialogue to dramatic action, from simple pathos to passionate earnestness, in the subtle and delicate fancy which often suffuses its childlike words, in its playful humour, its bold character-painting, in the even and balanced power which passes without an effort from the Valley of the Shadow of Death to 'the land 'where the Shining Ones commonly walk because it is on the borders of Heaven,' in its sunny kindliness unbroken by one bitter word, the *Pilgrim's Progress* is among the noblest of English poems."

It will generally be admitted that the *Pilgrim's Progress* is the greatest of English prose books, written with a mastery to

which no other has attained. For myself I confess that even above the *Pilgrim's Progress* I prefer as a masterpiece of style *Grace Abounding*. But *Grace Abounding* may be thought to have in it a certain morbid element not to be discovered in *Pilgrim's Progress*. "It is," said Coleridge, "a study for a philosopher, and it is the best study for the origin and essence of Puritanism."

## MISCELLANEOUS

I add a few books which may be read with the greatest advantage. *Montaigne's Essays*, in three volumes, are included in the "World's Classics," and better reading is hardly to be found. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is one of the immortal books. It is printed in two volumes in the "World's Classics." Pope's translation of *Homer's Odyssey* is in the same series. It is also included in "Everyman's Library" in the translation of William Cowper. Also, there is one

## *Miscellaneous*

Scientific book which is almost essential—  
*The Origin of Species*, by Charles Darwin—  
to be found in the “World’s Classics.” I  
would fain have named a hundred more but  
the foundation is laid.

# • *History* •

## VI

### HISTORY

THERE need be no hesitation in naming Macaulay's *History of England*, published in "Everyman's Library" in three volumes. The merits of Macaulay are transcendent and far outweigh his faults. • "No one," says the great French critic, Taine, "has so well taught or known history. He is not a poet like Michelet; he is not a philosopher like Guizot; but he possesses so well all the oratorical powers, he accumulates and arranges so many facts, he holds them so closely in his hand, he manages them with so much ease and vigour, that he succeeds in recomposing the whole and harmonious woof of history, not losing or separating one thread. The poet reanimates the dead, the philosopher formulates creative laws, the orator knows, expounds, and

pleads causes. The poet resuscitates souls, the philosopher composes a system, the orator redispenses chains of arguments; but all three march towards the same end by different routes, and the orator, like his rivals, and by other means than his rivals, reproduces in his work the unity and complexity of life." If it were only for his style Macaulay should be studied day and night, by all who wish to write clearly, vigorously and with current. The apes of Macaulay, as Freeman called them, are much mistaken, but every writer of English will do well to study his writings even though he may not quite call himself a disciple.

I will also mention that excellent book, Green's *Short History of the English People*. It is published in two volumes in "Everyman's Library," with useful revisions appendices, and maps. Green's book is full of colour and incident, and though in its earlier editions there were many inaccuracies these have been largely corrected. He had a strong sense of literary form, and was more

successful perhaps than any other man in bringing out the unity and continuity of great movements and of economic changes.

I should also have liked to name Justin M'Carthy's smooth and wonderfully accurate *History of Our Own Times*, but it is still in copyright. The chief historical work among English books is Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, published in six volumes in "Everyman's Library," but hardly to be tackled by beginners. Many years ago Professor Wellhausen, as we were walking in the neighbourhood of Greifswald, said to me "Gibbon is the great historian. He knows the watersheds."

I also find that I have omitted Ruskin—an indispensable writer. *Sesame and Lilies* is a good book to begin with. It appears in the "Everyman's Library" along with *The Two Paths* and *The King of the Golden River*, with an introduction by Sir Oliver Lodge.

Before proceeding with my complete list, I wish to name some other editions of the

## *Preliminary Essays*

works recommended. As things stand, I have naturally referred almost exclusively to "Everyman's Library" and the "World's Classics," but it would be unpardonable not to mention the beautiful editions of Messrs. Nelson. Messrs. Nelson publish at ninepence the chief works of Scott, Jane Austen, Dickens, George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, and others, and more seemly and tasteful little volumes there could not be. Also Messrs. Cassell have a good many of the books named, generally priced at eightpence. Messrs. Routledge also publish not a few standard works, generally at the price of a shilling.

I very strongly recommend purchasers to choose reprints with preliminary essays. These essays furnish most important help to the reader if they are decently done, as they usually are. They give the circumstances under which each book was published, details of its reception, and indications of its strong and weak points, which are most useful to the beginner, and indeed to all

## *List of Books*

readers. The very able gentlemen who preside over the libraries which I have mentioned will act wisely if they see that in future a competent introduction is prefixed to every book they publish

### LIST OF BOOKS

The list which follows is accurate at the time that I compile it, but the prices of books are continually being raised \*

#### BOOKS OF REFERENCE :

	s	d.
English Dictionary Chambers's . . . . .	3	6
Gazetteer. Chambers's . . . . .	7	6
Encyclopædia. Everyman (Dent) (12 vols) .	15	0

#### ESSAYS AND BELLES LETTRES :

Emerson's Essays Everyman . . . . .	1	3
Bacon's Essays Everyman . . . . .	1	3
Lamb's "Essays of Elia." Everyman . . . . .	1	3
Oliver Wendell Holmes' "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" Everyman . . . . .	1	3
Carlyle's Essays. Everyman (2 vols) . . . . .	2	6
Macaulay's Essays Everyman (2 vols.) . . . . .	2	6
Ruskin's "Sesame and Lilies" Everyman . . . . .	1	3

\* Since publication of my list the "Everyman Library" and the "World's Classics" have been raised respectively to 1s. 4d. and 1s. 3d.

## *List of Books*

### FICTION :

<i>Sir Walter Scott</i>			<i>s. d.</i>
"Ivanhoe." Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"The Heart of Midlothian " Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"The Antiquary " Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"Rob Roy." Everyman . . . .	1	3	

### *Jane Austen :*

"Emma " Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"Pride and Prejudice " Everyman . . . .	1	3	

### *Dickens .*

"Pickwick Papers " Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"Nicholas Nickleby " Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"Martin Chuzzlewit." Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"David Copperfield." Everyman . . . .	1	3	

### *Thackeray*

"Vanity Fair." Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"The Newcomes." Everyman (2 vols.) . . . .	2	6	
"Esmond." Everyman . . . .	1	3	

### *Charlotte Bronte :*

"Jane Eyre." Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"Villette." Everyman . . . .	1	3	

### *George Eliot :*

"Scenes of Clerical Life " Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"Adam Bede." Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"Silas Marner." Everyman . . . .	1	3	

### *Nathaniel Hawthorne :*

"Scarlet Letter." Everyman . . . .	1	3	
"Blithedale Romance." Everyman . . . .	1	3	

## *List of Books*

### FICTION (*continued*):

<i>Anthony Trollope :</i>	<i>s. d.</i>
"Barchester Towers." Everyman . . . . .	1 3
"Doctor Thorne" Everyman . . . . .	1 3
"Framley Parsonage." Everyman . . . . .	1 3
'Last Chronicle of Barset.'" Everyman (2 vols.) . . . . .	2 6
R. D. Blackmore's "Lorna Doone." Every- man . . . . .	1 3
Daniel Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe." Every- man . . . . .	1 3
Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels." Everyman . . . . .	1 3

### POETRY :

Shakespeare's Works Macmillan . . . . .	3 6
Palgrave's Golden Treasury World's Classics Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0
Milton's Poems World's Classics Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0
Poetical Works of Burns. World's Classics. Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0
Poems of Wordsworth. World's Classics. Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0
Poems of Coleridge. World's Classics. Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0
Poems of Byron World's Classics Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0
Poetical Works of Keats. World's Classics. Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0
Poems of Shelley. World's Classics. Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0
Longfellow's Poetical Works. World's Classics. Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0

## *List of Books*

POETRY ( <i>continued</i> ).		<i>s. d</i>
• Poems of Tennyson. World's Classics Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0	
• Poems of Robert Browning World's Classics Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0	
Poems of Matthew Arnold World's Classics Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0	
Poems of Christina Rossetti World's Classics Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0	
• Poems of William Morris. World's Classics Oxford University Press . . . . .	1 0	

### BIOGRAPHY :

Boswell's "Life of Johnson." Everyman (2 vols.) . . . . .	2 6
Lockhart's "Life of Scott." Everyman . . . . .	1 3
Carlyle's "Life of Sterling " World's Classics . . . . .	1 0
Mrs Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Brontë." Everyman . . . . .	1 3

### RELIGIOUS :

Thomas à Kempis' "Imitation of Christ " Everyman . . . . .	1 3
Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." Everyman . . . . .	1 3

### MISCELLANEOUS .

Montaigne's Essays World's Classics (3 vols ) . . . . .	3 0
Cervantes' "Don Quixote " World's Classics (2 vols.) . . . . .	2 0
Homer's "Odyssey " (Pope's Translation). World's Classics . . . . .	1 0
(Also included in "Everyman"—William Cowper's Translation )	
Darwin's "Origin of Species." World's Classics . . . . .	1 0

## *Conclusion*

HISTORY :	s. d.
Macauley's "History of England." Everyman	6
(3 vols) . . . . .	3 9
Green's "Short History of the English People"	
Everyman (2 vols) . . . . .	2 6
	<hr/> £5 12 9

## CONCLUSION

AND now I bring to an end a very pleasant task, which has turned out not so easy as I expected it to be. I have had much encouragement and many letters of appreciation from readers of every class. I know of a good many who are purchasing books for themselves, and some are purchasing them to give away. A library of this kind given to young people may be of the greatest possible service in their intellectual and moral development.

One of the most brilliant of our critics has sent me a charming letter, which I venture to publish. One of the greatest pleasures of reading is to discuss the qualities of favourite books with sympathetic friends. I make an extract from his kind letter :—

## • Conclusion •

“ ‘Claudius Clear’ has been specially interesting in his £5 Library, and most of all when the number of an author’s works compels him to make a selection among them. I looked at once to his favourite among the Waverleys. If I had been with him I should have pleaded for *Quentin Durward*. It is the best of all as a story of adventure, and Quentin himself is the best of Scott’s young heroes. He is not the prig that some of them tend to be. Then Louis XI. shows Scott at his best as a character painter, and the scenes between him and Charles the Bold are wonderful. I should have put ‘Q. D.’ in the place of *The Antiquary*. *The Heart of Midlothian* is wonderful down to the time when Jeanie Deans starts for London, but less so afterwards, except her interview with the Queen. I agree that *Rob Roy* is the finest of all. It has the finest love scenes, and Baillie Nicol Jarvie makes even the rise of Scottish commerce attractive. I should put *Redgauntlet* very high, both for the opening letters, and

## Conclusion

the picture of Charles Edward in his decline. But the Quaker scenes are rather spun out, though they are a striking instance of Scott's power of doing justice to creeds and manners with which he has no natural sympathy. No one can question the choice of *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice* as Jane Austen's finest, though there are touches equally fine in *Persuasion*, but I admit they are only touches. In Dickens I should put *Dombey and Son* in place of *Nicholas Nickleby*. Captain Cuttle and Bunsby are, to my mind, his greatest achievements, the one as the most lovable of his eccentrics, the other as the most amusing for his cranks. I have no doubt that you are right about Thackeray, but personally I have never cared for *Esmond*. It is a triumph of literary art, but the hero's end is too much like marrying your mother-in-law. If it were not for the contemptible Stephen in the last part of *The Mill on the Floss*, I should put it above *Adam Bede*.

“I have given you enough disjointed com-

## *Conclusion*

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ments on your selections, but I am sure that a vast number of the readers of the B. W. will be profoundly grateful to 'C. C.' for giving them just what they most need—a signpost to tell them that neither all novelists nor all novels are equally good."

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